

# Review of Writing Japonisme: Aesthetic Translation in Nineteenth-Century French Prose

## Citation for published version (APA):

Sitzia, E. (2017). Review of Writing Japonisme: Aesthetic Translation in Nineteenth-Century French Prose. *L'Esprit Créateur*, 57(1), 142-142. <https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.2017.0014>

## Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2017

## DOI:

[10.1353/esp.2017.0014](https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.2017.0014)

## Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

## Document license:

Taverne

## Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

## General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

[www.umlib.nl/taverne-license](http://www.umlib.nl/taverne-license)

## Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

[repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl)

providing details and we will investigate your claim.

Download date: 03 Nov. 2021



PROJECT MUSE®

---

*Writing Japonisme: Aesthetic Translation in  
Nineteenth-Century French Prose* by Pamela Genova (review)

Emilie Sitzia

L'Esprit Créateur, Volume 57, Number 1, Spring 2017, p. 142 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.2017.0014>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/659025>

Pamela Genova. *Writing Japonisme: Aesthetic Translation in Nineteenth-Century French Prose*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2016. Pp. xviii + 344.

Pamela Genova's volume aims to explore the relationship between Japanese visual arts and French prose in the second half of the nineteenth century. This is a courageous book that tackles a controversial topic in art historical circles (the influence of Japanese art on French art) within an interdisciplinary environment. The corpus is composed of well-researched authors—Edmond de Goncourt, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Emile Zola, and Stéphane Mallarmé—but the reader regrets that the volume did not consider introducing a more in-depth and much needed study of Zacharie Astruc's writings, a leading figure of French Japonisme. The reader also misses illustrations and a complete bibliography.

The introduction "Japonisme and the Ambivalence of Theory" offers a brief introductory review of the discussions around the concept of Japonisme. While it offers a clear overview—and is certainly useful as an introduction to the topic—it is too short to present properly the nuances and the variety of arguments in the Japonisme debate. Japonisme is often taken for granted, and a critical and contextual approach would have been welcome as, when exploring nineteenth-century painters' texts, their stance often highlights that Japanese art justifies their existing practices rather than inspiring new ones.

The prelude "Aesthetic Translation: Modalities of Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Correspondance" is a highlight of the book. While the idea of using translation theories to tackle interdisciplinarity is not new—it has been used at least since the 1990s in the works of scholars such as LeMen or Louvel—it lays out clearly the issues around translation with, at its core, the matter of literality vs. fidelity. Genova presents masterfully the positions of various authors and builds a clear image of this methodological tool. The chapter carries on with an exploration of Orientalism and its relationship with Japonisme.

Chapter one, "Edmond de Goncourt: Portraits of Artists," presents a well-documented account of Edmond de Goncourt as a collector and as a writer. Tadamasu is introduced as an important figure in the development of Goncourt's Japonisme. Genova leads a convincing analysis of Goncourt's texts. Her analysis of *La maison d'un artiste* and the biographies of Utamaro and Hokusai make for a solid argument on the aesthetic translations taking place in Goncourt's works. Chapter two, "Joris-Karl Huysmans: Prose Painting and the Decadent Novel," and chapter three, "Emile Zola: Writing of and Writing with Arts," are not as convincing as the links with Japonisme are lost in the abundance of material presented. Zola and Huysmans are doubtlessly influenced by the visual arts as is shown by Genova and many scholars before her. But the specificity of the Japanese influence stays too vague among the numerous other potential influences, and the textual analyses are too few to convince the reader fully. Chapter four, "Stéphane Mallarmé: Staging Japonism," is a surprising and original study of the relationship of Japanese performing arts and Mallarmé's writing and conception of performance.

Overall this is an erudite book and a must-read for anyone interested in nineteenth-century French literature, Japonisme, and interdisciplinary methodologies.

EMILIE SITZIA  
Maastricht University